Interview with Elden B. Erickson

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ELDEN B. ERICKSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is June 25, 1992 and this is an interview with Elden B. Erickson. This is Charles Stuart Kennedy. Elden, I wonder if you could give me a bit about your background ...where you were born, how you grew up and where your were educated?

ERICKSON: I was born in Norway, Kansas on the Republican River December 15, 1919. My father ran a hotel and also a hardware store in this little town of about 125 people. He was a Swedish immigrant who came with his family in the 1890s. My mother was of Anglo-American descent. We moved to Concordia, a much larger town of about 6,000 when I was four. It was the largest town within a radius of 60 miles. I grew up and went to school there. My family still lives there and I go back every two or three years.

Q: Any interest in foreign affairs particularly at that time?

ERICKSON: The only interest I had was that my father talked about Sweden, Norway and Germany. He spoke some German so I was interested in that. I remember the Crown Prince of Sweden came when I was in about the fifth grade and I wrote him a letter and was all excited because I got a reply back on his stationery from Drottningholm Castle. So there was some interest, although directed towards Sweden more than anywhere else.

Q: Did you go to college from there?

ERICKSON: I went to college in 1937 at Emporia State University in Emporia. I majored in education and foreign languages...French, Spanish and German.

At the beginning of the war, 1941, I was offered a couple of commissions, one in the Navy and one in the Army. But I could not pass the physical examination due to my eyes. I was 4F for about a year and then they lowered the requirements and I was finally taken in and accepted for officer training. But again I couldn't pass the physical. I was good enough to be an enlisted man, but not an officer.

I went to Fort Leavenworth and then to Miami Beach in the Air Corps. Then to England in February 1944. I made a landing on Utah Beach before the ports were open at the beginning of August 1944. In the Battle of Normandy I got a field commission because they had no physical examination facilities, so I finally became a second lieutenant.

Q: Was this with the Air Force?

ERICKSON: I was in the Air Force in Florida for a year in the Judge Advocate General's office. I had shorthand and I did court reporting the whole year with the Air Force. Then I went with the Army, to the Adjutant's office in an engineer battalion. At the end of the war, I was south of N#rnberg at Schwabach and was transferred to Military Government and spent a little over a year there after the war.

Q: What was your impression of the Military Government? Where were you, etc? This is an interesting phase that sort of melds into the Foreign Service experience.

ERICKSON: I was deputy military government officer in Schwabach, which is just 16 kilometers south of N#rnberg. The main work at that time was denazification. You probably have heard about the famous “fragebogen” which all candidates for official jobs had to complete.

Q: Yes, a very complete questionnaire that everybody had to fill out to find out what they had done during the war.

ERICKSON: I was also, besides deputy military government officer, trade and industry officer. We were trying to reestablish, and rehabilitate their industry. This particular place where I was, Schwabach, was an old center of the manufacture of needles for all of Europe and it was also the gold leaf center of Europe.

Q: In dealing with the denazification...here were some military guys dealing with a very complex, basically political problem in another country. How did you feel you handled the task?

ERICKSON: I think we did a good job. Well, the Military Government people really were not military types in general. They were lawyers, professionals, engineers, etc.

Q: What was your impression of the denazification process, which was essentially to remove those who had positions of authority in the Nazi Government from similar positions in the post-war government.

ERICKSON: We really did remove all of those that we could identify as having served in top positions. We saw to it that they could not get any jobs of influence in the government.

Another problem we had, though, was the communists trying to come in to replace the Nazis that were being thrown out. At one point intelligence told me to carry a gun because certain communists were after me for not permitting the communists to take over from the Nazis.

Q: Was it a matter of our appointing people and we just didn't appoint them? Did we have a hand in the selection process?

ERICKSON: Yes, we had to approve anybody who became the Landrat or the Burgermeister or other senior officials. They were very good, although it seems everyone had been a Nazi, but when you went to identify them there weren't any. There were really people who had been against the regime, worked against the regime or at least had been silent. We really found good people to take over. They were definitely not sympathizers to the Nazis.

Q: So this got you up to about 1947?

ERICKSON: I was in the Army 1942-46. I left Germany in 1946 and came back to Emporia again. I had started on my Masters and had only one semester to finish. So I went back and finished that. I didn't know for sure what I wanted to do so I went to Mexico for the summer to brush up on my Spanish. At a small Presbyterian college in Emporia, the language teacher had resigned for ill health so I took over for one semester. I loved teaching and thought that was what I was going to do with the rest of my life.

In the Army I had taken a trip to Rome. I remember the price was $21 for the whole round-trip, including hotels, etc. It was sponsored by the military. I went to the Embassy in Rome on the Via Veneto and thought that would be a nice place to work. That gave me the idea so while I was teaching I wrote to the State Department and asked about overseas jobs. They sent me some kind of publication. It didn't say anything about the Foreign Service examination. I am not sure they were even giving it at that time.

Anyway, I filled out an application and within just a couple of months I got back a letter offering me employment as an FSS-14 at $2160 a year plus approximately a $1000 allowances. I was just working at the college and getting $3000 a year and thought “Gee, that is $160 more than I am getting now and I get to travel.” So I sent a cable back and said that I would be happy to do this but had a contract with the college in Emporia until the end of the school year. They came back and said that was fine, just come when you are finished.

So, I did. They were just desperate for young people to go to China at that time. They were recruiting anyone off the streets practically...single men. So that is how I entered the Foreign Service.

Q: Did you know when you came that you were going to go to China?

ERICKSON: No, not at all. But as soon as I got to Washington I was put into a training course in the code room for people going to Russian-occupied China. We had to transmit messages through the Soviet Union at that time...from Manchuria. I was assigned to Dairen.

Q: Basically you were going as a code clerk?

ERICKSON: Well, it was clerk-general but we all had to have this code training. I thought I would go to China for a year and if I didn't like it I could go back to teaching which I knew I liked. I had no intention of pursuing a career at all.

Q: You ended up in Mukden, how did you get there?

ERICKSON: We had to have a visa for Dairen from the Russians. Personnel suggested that I take a ship to China because it usually took a long time to get a visa. They arranged everything for me. It took 45 days from New York via the Canal, Hawaii and the Philippines. I finally got to Shanghai in October 1947. I just waited there to get the visa. I was made the “meeter and greeter” so I met everybody who came into China via Shanghai. Also I was put in charge of the Commissary and just worked as a general services officer in a sense to help out while waiting for the visa.

The visa never ever came. Again, I heard it was because of my problem with the communists that I had fired when I was military government officer. There was never an explanation or anything. Finally in February the Department gave up trying to get the visa and I was sent to Mukden.

Q: Dairen was part of the old Port Arthur area of which the Soviets had control. What was the situation in China when you arrived?

ERICKSON: The Communists had still not taken over any major city. The long march had taken place and they were moving out from there. By the time I arrived they had just captured Changchun in northern Manchuria. Oliver Edmund Clubb and Al Siebens were the two officers there so they had to be evacuated. Clubb went to Peking and Siebens came to Mukden. So they were already moving down from the north with the support of the Russians, of course. After Changchun fell, they kept coming closer to Mukden.

Q: How did you get to Mukden?

ERICKSON: Military plane.

Q: When did you get there?

ERICKSON: February 1948.

Q: Was it a Consulate General?

ERICKSON: Yes.

Q: What was it like...the staffing, etc.?

ERICKSON: There were five of us young fellows...clerks, plus a vice consul, Bill Stokes; another vice consul, Fred Hubbard and his secretary; Angus Ward, who was consul general; a Japanese-American who was maintenance officer. Angus wanted to maintain as large a staff as possible in case we were taken over. He wanted to be able to send one person out as courier every couple of months. We were all volunteers. He wouldn't keep anybody unless they volunteered to stay on.

Q: I take it from what you are saying that you were getting ready for a long difficult spell?

ERICKSON: Yes, it was obvious that that was what was coming. The government figured that we would be able to work on some sort of scale with the Communists or we would just be expelled and that would be it. They didn't anticipate what actually happened.

Q: How long was it before the Communists came into Mukden?

ERICKSON: I arrived in February and they didn't come in until the first of November. We (the Chinese Nationalists) had a million troops in the city so it was pretty active and congested. The Communists would move up to the perimeter of the city and then be forced back. It was just a kind of expanding and contracting of the defense perimeter.

Q: What were you doing before the Communists took over?

ERICKSON: Well, we had regular dealings with the Nationalist government—political, military and economic. We had an aid program at the time too. We were flying in grain to try to support them. So it was a busy time. We weren't idle at all during this period.

Q: I realize you were pretty much tied to the office but what was your impression of the Nationalist regime in that particular area?

ERICKSON: We had very little confidence in the Nationalist regime. One, because of corruption and also, whenever the defense perimeter would get broader and Chiang Kai-shek thought he could have a major victory, he would come up to take charge and whenever he appeared everything collapsed, every single time. So as far as the Nationalists were concerned we really didn't have any confidence at all that they would keep the territory.

Q: Was this sort of reporting going out?

ERICKSON: Never.

Q: What about Angus Ward at this time? How did he strike you the first few months you were there?

ERICKSON: Well, he was very much in charge. Very imposing and autocratic. He had good contacts with the Chinese authorities. He was busy constantly either with the office or working on his dictionary. You probably have heard about that.

Q: Yes, the famous dictionary which was in...

ERICKSON: He had already done it in Chinese and Mongolian, and was in the process of making it trilingual to include Japanese. He employed, himself, a Japanese teacher to help with the Japanese side. But the whole thing was handwritten...big volume-like ledgers. It was really amazing. He had a card file that was unbelievable. All done by hand.

Q: As the defense perimeter expanded and narrowed, how did you feel about the situation? As far as you know were there any feelers put out to the Communists forces?

ERICKSON: Not as far as I know. I don't think we did.

Q: What was your impression and view and experience in November 1948 when things changed?

ERICKSON: The Communists came in on the first of November and we were very apprehensive. We were on the roof of the Consulate General when they came in. We could see them coming down the main street.

Q: Had the Nationalist Army just plain pulled out?

ERICKSON: They just evaporated. They were nowhere to be seen.

We went up to the roof of the Consulate and watched them start taking over the communications building which was about two blocks down. Then they came up to our

area. I remember there was an old lady that they just shot and went right on. They saw us looking over the top of the building and they started shooting at us. Of course we then ducked down. They didn't at that point come into the building.

Q: How had the Consul General prepared for this eventuality.

ERICKSON: We had lots of food in tins and sacks and sacks of flour. Angus was afraid that we would get bored so we would have to take these 48 pound sacks of flour from one room to another. And then in a month or two we would move it all up to the second floor. A couple of months later we would move it bag by bag somewhere else. He said it was to keep the mites out, etc. But it was really to keep us busy. As much as we disliked doing that it really was a good idea. But it didn't make him all that popular.

Q: Was Mrs. Ward there at that time?

ERICKSON: She was there the whole time. They lived about four blocks from the Consulate General. The rest of us had moved into the Standard Oil Compound.

Q: What happened?

ERICKSON: That is another thing you mentioned ...preparation. We had had several houses and also apartments in the Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank building. When we knew the Communists were coming in we all consolidated in the Standard Oil Compound.

Q: When they came in how was contact made?

ERICKSON: They just ignored us totally the first few days.

Q: Did you walk out?

ERICKSON: Our compound was just about two blocks away. We walked back and forth for the first 20 days. We were just totally free to do whatever we wanted.

Q: Were we trying to make contact?

ERICKSON: Yes, Angus was trying to make contact but he couldn't.

Q: Were the British there and any others?

ERICKSON: British and French. That was all.

Q: Were they doing anything?

ERICKSON: They didn't leave, but they didn't plan to leave. Even when we left a year later, they allowed us to turnover everything in the compound to the British. We had a walk through with Steventon, who was the top Brit at the time. That was the first contact we had had with the British except to wave over the wall or the gate or something like that.

They came in on November first. On November 20 they threw a cordon of guards around the Consulate building and around the Standard Oil Compound and Ward's residence. From then on we could only go with them. To go to the office they would come to the compound and march us with pistols in our back to the Consulate. We would have to show our lunch and they would inspect it, etc. Then they would bring us back in the evening. Only half of us would go each day so no one was isolated.

Q: What were you doing?

ERICKSON: Nothing, but we were showing the flag, pretending to be carrying on normally. We were moving flour part of the time.

They always gave us the newspapers. In the beginning the Chinese staff still came to work. We were translating. It was very interesting what was in the press at that time. So we were doing that. And we sent messages the first twenty days, but after that, nothing.

Q: How about that? Didn't we have wireless connections?

ERICKSON: We had transmitters.

Q: Was that forbidden after that?

ERICKSON: Well, they came and took all the equipment away. They went into every house, every room, everywhere and got any radios, anything electronic. That was the pretext for clamping down. That we were doing unauthorized transmitting.

Q: Wasn't there some kind of accusation against Angus Ward?

ERICKSON: That came later.

Q: Was there any protest?

ERICKSON: There was protest but they didn't recognize the American Consulate, the American Government, that America even existed. They stated that they didn't recognize America or the Consulate General. They just flatly said so. After the 20th they would come to the office and demand the radio equipment and this and that. And, of course, Angus stood absolutely solid against their commands.

Q: Was there any way to get word out at all?

ERICKSON: Not at all. We were totally incommunicado after the 20th. Nothing in or out.

Q: How did you feel about this after a while?

ERICKSON: Well, mostly apprehensive. We were afraid at times too, but it was more a wondering of what would happen.

Q: How long did the Chinese staff stay?

ERICKSON: I can't remember exactly. They were told very soon after we were locked up to not have any more communication with us. They still lived in the servants quarters in

the compound and they would bring eggs and various things because we had no way at that point to go to the market. Although we did have canned food in the commissary. The servants would leave eggs and fresh vegetables in the basement and we would go down and find them in the morning. But we couldn't talk to them or have any communication with them. They didn't dare, and we didn't want to jeopardize their status.

Q: How was Mrs. Ward during this period of time?

ERICKSON: She stayed at home at the residence all the time. As long as Angus was there he went home every day.

Q: Were you still being marched back and forth?

ERICKSON: The whole time. But you weren't sure when they would come or if they would come. Sometimes they didn't and you just didn't go.

Q: You waited for them to escort you?

ERICKSON: We got very snotty with them. I would make a sandwich to take and would shove it in front of them to take a look at it and say “hsiao palu” (”little Communist”). They were furious but couldn't do anything with us without instructions.

Q: Were there any anti-American demonstrations?

ERICKSON: Oh yes. Every single day. Singing and parades all along the side of our compound. I still can sing their little chant—without communism there will be no China. Two or three hours every day in the beginning.

Another thing that was rather terrifying in the beginning was that every night we were bombed by the Nationalists. That was ironic too. Here we were being bombed by our own planes. We were hit one evening, quite a few of the windows blown out. Ralph Rehberg

was hit and also Franco Cicogna. I remember picking glass with tweezers out of their lips, etc.

We had a regular drill to put water in the bathtub and open all the windows because of concussion. It was already getting cold.

Q: And, of course, that is a very cold area up there. Did you get the feeling that nobody cared or knew the situation?

ERICKSON: Yes. We had no knowledge otherwise. It was an eerie sensation. It went on and on. Then they cut off our electricity which cut off our water supply. And we had no fuel. You couldn't take a bath because there was no hot water. You just put on layers of clothing like the Chinese did. They didn't take our clothing away. Each week we were permitted to write a list in Chinese of what we wanted and give it to a couple who would come to the gate. But we couldn't speak to them. We kept ordering needles because our clothes were wearing out. The servants had done all the mending before. So that really became an important thing, to have a needle. Thread was another item.

But it was really the cold that I remember the worst. It would get 40 below and that was really cold. Then the pump would freeze. We didn't have any running water, of course. We would bake bread and the cockroaches would practically line the bread pans as it was rising. We would bake it with the cockroaches in it and then just slice the sides off...they didn't get inside the bread.

What did we do? We played bridge. We didn't have any electricity and nights start very early in the wintertime. We did get candles and that was all we had. We played pinochle five days and couldn't stand it any longer so started playing bridge. They always let us buy Vodka. The vegetables—carrots and cabbage—we got most of the time... meat, from time to time, but it would be full of straw and dirt. However, we would just wash it up and boil it

well. We were never hungry. And I think that is important in maintaining at least a modicum of morale. If you are cold and hungry that is a lot worse then being just cold.

Q: Did the authorities ever try taking a person out and threaten to kill them?

ERICKSON: They did the Chinese. They would even accuse them of taking “capitalist” baths. Eventually one night they were all taken away. We never were able to say goodbye. We had no idea, as far as I know, what happened to any of them.

Q: You mentioned that there was a Japanese-American there.

ERICKSON: He was an American citizen, Tatsumi.

Q: Yes, but obviously being oriental. Did this cause him any particular problem?

ERICKSON: There is another time frame when Angus Ward and four others were taken away and put in solitary confinement, Tatsumi was treated much worse then any of the others. They would tell him that Angus Ward was killing his wife and his children and they would have people outside, women, who would scream pretending that all of this was going on. So as far as mental torture was concerned, he was probably the worst off. The five of them were in solitary confinement for four weeks. They were taken from the compound, put in solitary and then returned after four weeks. Then they were tried as criminals for assaulting one of our Chinese employees. There was lots in the Communist paper about that.

Q: This a very common type of accusation.

ERICKSON: There was nothing to it. He, Chi Yuheng, had been put up to it. He was a very nice man. He wouldn't ever have done this. But he came up to demand his severance pay. Ward said that he had quit and escorted him out. The press said that Ward was so rough

on him that he lost control of his bladder. Also that Ward had mistreated him, etc. This was a criminal charge according to the Chinese. I think that was in April 1949.

Q: What happened when they came in and took five people away? How many of you were left?

ERICKSON: There were nine of us including the dependents, no, thirteen.

Q: What were your thoughts?

ERICKSON: We didn't know if they were coming back. When Angus was taken out to the truck, he insisted I come along. I still did my shorthand. Every time he had a meeting with the Communists I took it all down in shorthand. So when he was taken out forcefully from the Consulate with the other four, he said, “Erickson, you come along with your notebook.” I had my notebook and went out the front door and towards the weapons carrier, or whatever, and the Communists kept saying “You can't go. You can't go.” And to him, “You go, move on. You go, move on.” We got finally just to the truck and they took their bayonets and pushed me right back into the Consulate. Angus said, “You better go back.” So I escaped all the trouble, really.

Q: This must have left you feeling very isolated, even more?

ERICKSON: Yes. We had no idea what would happen to us, to them, to anybody. They were tried as criminals. So we were very surprised to see them back four weeks later.

Q: Was anyone in charge during that time?

ERICKSON: Well, Bill Stokes was in charge.

Q: But you were reading about this in the Chinese papers?

ERICKSON: No, not at that time.

Q: But you really had no feel as to what was happening?

ERICKSON: We were just too isolated.

Q: When they came back in April, then how long did you remain?

ERICKSON: In June we were charged with espionage. Up to that time we were just there, not charged with anything. I made some notes at the time:

June 1 - the radio announced that we had been closed.

June 6 - we got a telephone call and letter from Shanghai. I don't know what that said.

June 7 - a letter from Clubb.

Q: Were these your first letters from anybody?

ERICKSON: Yes. We hadn't heard anything from anybody until that time.

June 20 - we were charged with being spies and read about it in the newspaper.

Then there was a trial and we were charged with espionage and Bill Stokes was permitted to attend the trial.

Q: You were involved?

ERICKSON: Yes, I was charged with espionage. They had the finding ready before the trial so it went very fast.

Q: How did this trial work?

ERICKSON: Only Stokes was there. They just read off all the charges and the findings and that was it. All of it was bilingual in Chinese and Japanese.

We didn't know when Stokes left for the trial what would happen to him either.

The economic and administrative people got three years in prison. Angus and the political people—Stokes, Hubbard —got five years, as I recall.

All the sentences were commuted to immediate deportation and banishment forever from the Peoples Republic. That was it.

But time went on and on...

Q: Stokes came back with the results. Were you feeling that you were going to end up in jail at that time?

ERICKSON: Well, we felt we would, yes. That was the decision.

Q: At this point, what were you thinking about a Foreign Service career?

ERICKSON: I thought I would decide after a year in the Foreign Service as to whether I would stay in, well, I was locked up the whole second year. I wasn't thinking about my career at all, just of staying alive.

Q: So this trial came in June. Then what happened?

ERICKSON: We just sat there and waited. Occasionally we would get a message or something from Clubb in Peking. But no movement one way or another. When they did finally come I think we said that we wouldn't leave without our things. They said, “You can't take your personal belongings.”

But finally one day they came in December 1949 and said to be ready to go in 24 hours. We could take 20 kilos each. Everything else was to be left behind. Of course we had to take the cats and dogs. Our captors came early one morning in December and it was cold. We got into an open personnel carrier with soldiers at all four corners covering us with

rifles. After we climbed in three more came with pistols to cover us from behind. We got down to the railroad station and there was a big semicircle of military or police. We got on board this horse car with six big stalls in it and cold as the devil.

Q: This was the entire staff including Angus?

ERICKSON: Well, before that the Communists came one day around noon and said that all of the foreign staff that we had had to leave within the hour. We were not able to speak to them, so they all left. This included people we had lived with for a year. We had grown very close and fond of all of them. We could not even say goodby to them. All of us broke down and cried, even Angus.

Q: Who were these people?

ERICKSON: There was a Russian administrative assistant, Elizabeth Butinski; accounts and disbursing assistant, Vladimir Petukhov; a German; a Czech; and another Russian, Sibagatoola Muhamedzan.

Q: A man in USIS...

ERICKSON: Yes, Mr. Bodinghaug, a German who was married to a Chinese and lived outside. He came and used the library a lot. When we were surrounded and locked up he was included. He never was permitted to have contact the whole period with his family.

The Communists said that the authorities of their countries asked that they be turned over to them.

Q: I take it most of the Russians were White Russians?

ERICKSON: Oh yes, very anti-Communist.

Q: So this was...

ERICKSON: They had all come with the Army to the East and when the Revolution succeeded they came into China and had been there since the First World War.

Q: Did you hear whatever happened to them?

ERICKSON: Petukhov, the disbursing agent, managed to get out and go to Australia.

The Russian, Sibagatoola Muhamedzan, was one of the nicest persons I have ever known. He and his wife used to take children off the street who were starving and I think they had 11 or 12 children they had picked up and were boarding. He was just a maintenance man, a low paid employee. We heard that when he got out, when he was taken away, he committed suicide because the authorities wouldn't give him anything to eat for the children and the only way to get stuff for the children was to have him commit suicide.

But that was the worst, saddest day of the whole incarceration, when they all were forced to leave the Consulate.

Q: Well, then all the Americans left. Was Ward and Mrs. Ward with you then? Did you all go together?

ERICKSON: Yes. When he was in solitary confinement for those four weeks I went over and stayed with her. They permitted me to do that.

Q: Then you were put on a train...

ERICKSON: We went to Tientsin. It was forty hours. There was an aisle and six stalls. All the windows were open despite the cold. Guards walked back and forth the whole time. We didn't know where we were going when we were put on the train. We thought we might actually be going to Siberia. We were told to bring enough food for 48 hours. Fortunately we did go to Tientsin rather than Siberia.

Q: What happened in Tientsin?

ERICKSON: All the consulates in China were still open at that time. They had sent Phil Manhard over from Peking to Tientsin. The Chinese made one person be responsible that we would not commit any crimes, etc. He was made that person. When we arrived at the train station, one by one we got off and had to go through a little building and sign documents that we had been well treated and had all our belongings. None of us could read it, but Phil Manhard said to go ahead and sign. We all got out and were turned over to the custody of the Tientsin Consulate General. We had to stay in their homes and promise not to go out. We could have no communication with anybody.

So we were there just a couple of days and then we had to go down to the waterfront and board a little tug. There had been an arrangement for the Lakeland Victory to pick us up out at Taku Bar but we had to go up the Hai River out to open water to board.

Q: There was an interview that was done by Marshall Green of Phil Manhard on this. He talked about first there was reluctance on the US part to get a ship. He said, "Listen you had better get a ship in here or otherwise your name will be mud."

ERICKSON: We got in the tug. We had to go down into the hold and it was dark and small and we were seated around like this. We got on Sunday afternoon and didn't get out to the ship until Monday morning. We couldn't move. My knees swelled. There were no toilet facilities. It was just a totally miserable trip. When we finally got there they let Angus Ward get off and go on board the ship with the Chinese. The ship was loaded with reporters who had all the good quarters. We had to take what was left over.

When some of the photographers started taking pictures, the Chinese then said they had to return the film, otherwise they were going to take us back. In the meantime, all except Angus were still stuffed in the hold. Time went on. We thought we weren't even going to get off now. We never knew what the next step was going to be throughout this

whole affair. Finally one of the photographers ripped his film out and handed it over to the Chinese with a big gesture and that satisfied them, face saving for them. Finally they let us get out of the tug and go on board the ship.

Q: What sort of reception did you get? Were you hemmed in by news people?

ERICKSON: They were after us the whole time. We resented it because we had to double up in small places so that they could have the nicer rooms. They would come at midnight to ask questions.

Q: Had you been put under instructions not to talk?

ERICKSON: Yes. Don't talk about anything because it would endanger the people who were still there. We still had Hugh Redman, CIA, there. He was in the detachment at Mukden, but the rest had pulled out long before. But he stayed on for some reason. He finally died in prison there. I think his mother went over a couple of times to see him.

And Tientsin and Peking were still staffed, etc. Anything we said really could endanger people. We were told that right in the beginning. I think Angus probably had instructions to tell us. Especially when we got back to Washington. We were told to be careful to just tell the facts and not speculate.

Q: How did you find your reception back at Washington? I think we are better now, but there has been a tendency that if any people get into trouble because of the situation, to sort of avoid them. Did you feel any of that when you came back? Or maybe you were too new to the Service to sense this?

ERICKSON: I was new to the Service and hadn't held a very high position. The publicity was tremendous. We stopped in Korea and got to Yokohama and there MacArthur turned the military inside out to help us. We were met with a band at the pier. We were all given cars and chauffeurs, cards to the PX and the drivers were told to take us anywhere we

wanted to go. We were really treated like top VIPs. They had flown in special cat food for Jeep, Saki, Saihan and Ranger, the Ward's cats.

Q: You might talk a little about them to give a feel for Ward's cats.

ERICKSON: Well, the Wards adored animals, but especially these four pets. My house mate, Wally Norman, and I would go occasionally to the Wards to lunch. They had a long wooden table. The cats would eat at one end and we would eat at the other end. We had cat hair in the soup, etc. They had a Chinese scroll with pictures of pheasants on it and the cats would race across the room and claw the pheasants.

Q: You were mentioning before we were on tape about a telegram that went out.

ERICKSON: Oh, about the cat house. He wanted to be able to transport the cats when we left Mukden and he sent a cable to Shanghai saying, “Request whereabouts cat house left Shanghai such and such a date.” I don't remember the reply.

Another perennial telegram going out to Tehran was, “What happened to case number forty eight of a certain kind of salmon?”

Q: He had been to Tehran before?

ERICKSON: Yes, that was his post before. It was the Cat Lovers Society of America who had flown in this cat food to Yokohama especially for Ward's cats.

Q: What was Angus Ward's background?

ERICKSON: He was from Allegan, Michigan. A kind of backwoodsman type, but very intelligent. I don't know how he got interested in Russian. He was a Russian expert. Irmgard was Finnish, and had gone to school in Leningrad. She often said, “A royal school for noble children.”

Q: Mrs. Loy Henderson also...

ERICKSON: Was she Finnish or Russian?

Q: I think Estonian, but she had also gone to the same school.

ERICKSON: Well, it was THE school.

That is all about the cats except that when I was back in Washington and they were still in Michigan, he called me and asked me to find a place to stay when they came to Washington that would take the cats. I went to every hotel in downtown Washington and never found a place that would take the cats. Finally they left them with his brother in Michigan.

Q: When you got back were you getting any feel for the advent of McCarthyism or had this started at that time?

ERICKSON: No. That didn't happen until I went to Algiers, my next post.

Q: What did you do when you got back to Washington?

ERICKSON: First, I checked into Personnel because I needed to get back to Kansas. It was two or three days before Christmas of 1949. So I went to Personnel and they said, “Well, we can't give you home leave because you haven't been out of the country for two years.” I said, “Where have I been?” They said, “According to your records you have only been....” I then became rather sarcastic and showed them I had been out two years. I don't know if they didn't count Mukden as being overseas or what.

Two of us flew back. All the rest took a ship back to the States. Jack Feigal and I wanted to be home for Christmas. When we got here Assistant Secretary Butterworth called us in

and welcomed us home. I don't feel that there was any ignoring of us. I think they were so glad to have the problem settled.

At the press conference for the two of us they kept asking hadn't it affected us, how did we feel, weren't we nervous? I said, “No.” And the next day the Washington Post had a big headline: “Erickson says nerves on edge.” I kept insisting that was not true.

Afterwards I flew to Kansas City and my brother and his wife met me there. Again there were reporters at the station but we avoided them. We drove the 200 miles to Concordia. We even stopped for lunch...my picture was in every local paper in Kansas and the people recognized me and wanted to give us a free lunch. It was a very well-known incident at the time. It was before TV.

Q: At that point how did you feel about the Foreign Service?

ERICKSON: Well, it is foolish now as I look back on it, but I became very idealistic and very anti-communist and wanted to do anything to really eliminate communism. When they asked me where I wanted to go I said, “I will go to any border country and do anything I can...

Q: I think this is one of the things we are trying to do, to reconstruct the period. You had a heavy dose of what we saw as the problem with a communist regime. Most of the people of our generation, this was essentially what their careers were about.

ERICKSON: Well, they laughed at me. They really did think I was foolish to want to go back. They thought there must have been something wrong with me. And there probably was. Anyhow that is how I felt at the time.

Q: What were the offers?

ERICKSON: Well, they were going to give me commercial training. I was offered Algiers or Barcelona which are pretty far from the communists. So I chose Barcelona. I went to the

Commerce Department field offices in Minneapolis and Milwaukee for training. I went back to Washington to get my tickets to go to Barcelona and they said, “Your assignment had been changed. We have a reservation for you by train tomorrow to New York and the next day by plane to Algiers.” There had been three people in the commercial section and all of them had become ill or something happened. So I went to Algiers. My trunks had gone to Barcelona.

Q: What was your status then?

ERICKSON: They had lost the records so there really wasn't much of a status. Promotion requests had been submitted and they were lost too. IRS was hounding me for income tax that I hadn't paid, even though I was only getting $2160 plus allowances. Finally Angus wrote a letter to all of us saying that he had gotten a ruling from IRS to give us time to pay our taxes and we wouldn't have to pay penalties.

Q: You had gone to Mukden as a clerk. Were you still going as a clerk?

ERICKSON: I still was, but as an economic clerk.

Q: In those days, the technical staff moved down...although there were officers who were called Foreign Service Staff who were holding down jobs that were not of a clerical function really.

ERICKSON: Lots of economic jobs were FSS. They had been brought in at various levels.

Q: You were in Algiers from 1950-54. Is that right?

ERICKSON: Yes.

Q: What was the situation there?

ERICKSON: Again it was pending revolution.

Q: Did you have the feeling of deja vu?

ERICKSON: Not really deja vu, but again we knew it was coming. There the second Consul General that we had was totally prepared for what happened...Lewis Clark, who had been the Minister in Nanking and who took the Embassy to Canton. At all his cocktail parties he assigned us one or two people that we were to get bio information about and it had to be turned in the next morning. His parties were for a purpose and we had to produce. Leon Dorros, coordinated it.

So, when the November 1st rebellion started we had very good files on who would probably stay, who wouldn't stay, who would do this and that.

Q: These were the French.

ERICKSON: We didn't have lots of Moslem contacts there because the French didn't want us to and when we traveled French police were always in the background. They knew what we were doing and were suspicious of us the whole time.

Q: This was the French intelligence service. What was the situation when you arrived in Algiers?

ERICKSON: The French were insisting that it was part of the Metropole, the three Departments Oran, Constantine and Algiers, and the Sahara area was separate. In spite of what had gone on in Tunisia and what was going on in Morocco in the independence movements, it was fairly slow in coming to Algeria. But you knew it was coming. However, lots of people were satisfied the way it was because the Moslem population did go back and forth to France and there were big exports from Algeria to France. And there wasn't all that much hard feeling between lots of Algerians and the French.

You had two types of French at that time. You had the Metropole French and the Algerian French, the latter being 3rd or 4th generations in many cases.

It was really a very calm situation when I arrived, but tension was under the rug all the time.

Q: What were you doing there?

ERICKSON: I did economic work the whole time.

Q: What were our concerns economically there?

ERICKSON: Well, 180 degrees from what they are now. At that time all the countries in Europe and Africa were so poor after the war that they couldn't buy anything from the US unless they had something to buy it with. So we were promoting exports from countries to the US so that they would have money. We were trying to get olive oil, briar pipes, anything they could send. Our big thing was export promotion to the US. However, the big Algerian crop was wine, which went to France, not here.

Q: Did you get any feel that there was a difference of how we were looking at things from Algiers and how the people in our Embassy in Paris were looking at things? Later on there developed this battle of North Africa between the European Bureau and either the African Bureau or at least those parts which were in north Africa.

ERICKSON: Our feeling in Algiers was that the Embassy really didn't know what was going on. I think that is kind of typical everywhere. But, perhaps more so there because the Embassy types would come down and they wouldn't go to restaurants and eat the food. They wouldn't eat butter because they were afraid that it was contaminated, or the lettuce unwashed. We ate everything and had no health problems. Not that this had anything to do with politics, but it was just part of their whole attitude towards this part of the country...it really isn't a place that is worth that much.

Q: How did you find the French officials that you had to deal with?

ERICKSON: I saw lots of French officials. I played bridge with the Governor General. I played bridge with all the top people.

Q: You turned into a very good bridge player after Mukden, huh?

ERICKSON: I enjoyed it. I had probably better contacts then anyone else. I was there so long. I was there four years and got to know them. I really had very good access to everyone.

I had gotten a promotion every year and a double promotion, so I went from FSS-14 to FSS-8 in Algiers.

Q: What were some of the major developments that affected us and you in Algiers during this period?

ERICKSON: That was the McCarthy period.

Q: Were you getting anything from this or were you just out of the line of fire even though having been in China?

ERICKSON: I don't think any of us in Mukden had trouble. But Clubb and many of the people we knew at other posts certainly did. We knew they were no more communists then we were. It only directly affected one person, so far as I know...no that wasn't McCarthy, that was budget cut. He had to leave in 30 days, in the first big RIF under Eisenhower.

Q: What about in Algeria? Were there any major political developments that affected our relations?

ERICKSON: No, other then the major undercurrents of the coming revolution. That was what we were reporting on. I went over by myself in my car every mile of national highway in Algeria and took pictures of the bridges. I didn't realize until much later that was really

spying. I felt it was just reporting on the highway transportation network. That was one thing that I did which certainly made me get around and talk to people. Again, I met lots of Moslems that way too.

Q: But it wasn't dangerous?

ERICKSON: No, not at that time.

Q: Were you getting echoes from what was happening in Vietnam at the time? We are talking about Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

ERICKSON: It favored Algeria in a way. There were a number of French firms who had capital and were moving out of Southeast Asia, particularly from Vietnam, and they were investing in Algeria, etc. So financially the pullout in Southeast Asia was a boon to Algeria.

Q: When you left, Algiers was essentially quiet.

ERICKSON: It was quiet. I left on October 1, 1954 and November 1 was the start of the rebellion. I was transferred to Paris and one month later all hell broke loose.

Q: You served in Paris from 1954-56. What were you doing there.

ERICKSON: I was industry reporting officer which was the best job in the Embassy.

Q: What does an industry reporting officer do?

ERICKSON: I reported on ship building, automobiles, motion picture industry, and all phases of industry, which at that time was still recovering after the war.

Q: Did you feel a bit like a country cousin coming into the big city or did you always maintain your view that these people were a bit precious?

ERICKSON: No, I think I have always maintained my country view, no matter what. But it was such an exciting city and exciting life. For me it was an exciting job. I went to ship launchings all the time. I represented the Ambassador at the Cannes Festival one year. I had a new convertible and I was asked to escort Kim Novak from her hotel to the casino. Burt Lancaster invited me to Maxime's for dinner. For a young person it was rather exciting.

Oh, Mrs. Clark (Lewis Clark was Consul General), was one of a number of Vassar girls of the same class who married Foreign Service Officers. I think there were six of them. I don't remember who they were now, except one of them was Marian Achilles. Ted Achilles was at that time Minister in Paris. Mrs. Clark wrote to Marian Achilles and said, “Erickson is coming to Paris and I want you to take care of him. If you need any fill in for a black tie dinner, for a party, for anything in French, you just call on Eric and he will be there.” So what could I do? It turned out I was often called, maybe an hour before dinner or something. But not just for emergencies, they invited me to other things too.

Q: What were American-French relations like at the time?

ERICKSON: I think de Gaulle was out by that time. He was, because in Algiers he came down to give a speech at the Place du Gouvernement. I went to it and walked out. It was so anti-American I couldn't stand it even to listen to the whole thing and then report it. It just made me boil and I left. So I know he was not in when I went from there to Paris.

Also, one of our employees at the Embassy...her father was the concierge at the Parliament...got me a pass so that I could attend all the sessions of Parliament. It was a period of unsettlement for France.

Q: There was the Geneva Conference and the settlement with the Vietnamese and all that.

ERICKSON: I was at the National Assembly the night that Mendes-France submitted his resignation. He said to his fellow deputies that they would live to regret it. It was an interesting period too.

Q: At your meeting with French officials and industry people how did you find their feelings towards the Americans?

ERICKSON: It was generally very good at that time, I think. There were always the French who were not all that friendly towards Americans. But I think basically our relations were quite good. Ambassador Dillon was the ambassador at the time. I think he certainly was well respected and did a lot for our relations as well.

Q: What was your impression of the French intellectuals? It seems to be in no other country that you have such a so-called class of intellectuals that seems to be important? Did you find that it was important?

ERICKSON: Yes, in France it is important.

Q: He was editor of Le Monde?

ERICKSON: I'm not sure. I had met him and should know, but I don't remember.

Again, the Ambassador had a party every Thursday night and we took turns going and got to meet and know people in those days. I have a feeling today you are so security minded that you don't get to meet the people that you used to.

Q: Was the impression you got that the French intellectuals were viscerally from the Left and that the Americans were just culturally a wasteland?

ERICKSON: Yes, that was the impression. But I don't think we took that all too much to heart. That was just the way it was. Maybe we should have.

Q: I think it comes with the territory.

ERICKSON: I had landed in Normandy and I spoke French at that time. When we went through the countryside they brought flowers, Calvados, etc. I had such a warm feeling for the French that I probably always leaned to the pro-French side.

Q: Were there any major political developments during your tour?

ERICKSON: I think Mendes-France...it was more internal France...well not entirely. But internal France was more important at that time then France-US it seems to me. They were really going through a difficult time.

Q: It was sort of the last gasp of the Fourth Republic. What were your impression of Douglas Dillon as Ambassador?

ERICKSON: I thought he was just super in just every respect. I think I probably felt that because he read every word of my industry reports and often called me in to ask about them.

Q: He was an economist wasn't he?

ERICKSON: Yes. This was the time that they had the Wriston program to convert FSS to FSO simply by writing why you thought you should be one. I was converted from an FSS-8 to an FSO-6. When they called me in I originally said that I was happy the way I was and didn't really plan on staying in. So there was no point in converting. They said that I probably wouldn't be able to do economic work if I didn't convert. So I went ahead and did it for that reason, not because I was desperate to become an officer. I still was not planning to make it a career. I just kind of drifted on and since I enjoyed it all the time I didn't leave.

Q: As an industry officer, what was your impression of the possibility of integrating Europe?

ERICKSON: I think we all felt that that was part of our mission. Not to just integrate Europe, but to integrate us with Europe as well. But it had to start with their integration.

Q: Did you feel that it would work?

ERICKSON: Yes, there was a great feeling at that time...they had just started up at Strasbourg, the beginnings of the integration. And the coal, steel community, the three European communities were formed, it seems to me, at that time.

Q: What about de Gaulle? Was he seen sort of hovering in the wings?

ERICKSON: As far as I remember, he was seen as totally finished by that time. Especially when the Algerian Rightists turned against him.

Q: So people weren't waiting for him to reappear?

ERICKSON: No.

Q: Also I take it from what you said he didn't seem to be somebody who was going to be helpful to the situation, at least as far as we were concerned?

ERICKSON: To the contrary as far as the US.

Q: Then you left and staying in the sphere of French influence went to a hot spot again, Laos, where you stayed from 1956-58. How did you feel about this?

ERICKSON: I really did plan to quit then. I tried to get out of the assignment actually. Unbeknownst to me, my future wife was here [in Washington] with Jeff Parsons sending telegrams saying I couldn't get out of it.

Q: Your future wife was...?

ERICKSON: She was Parsons' secretary in Tokyo and he had asked her to go with him to Laos. She was here while he was on consultation and then came to Laos. I hadn't met her at that time.

Q: What were you going to do in Laos?

ERICKSON: I was THE economic section in Laos. No secretary, no typewriter, no window in my office, I was it. My only claim to fame there was that I decided what the GNP of Laos was and it stuck for at least a number of years. I invented that.

Q: That is one of those figures that all of us learn that if they want a figure, we will give them a figure.

ERICKSON: That is right. We had no figures from Laos before I went, so I tried to give them a right figure.

Q: You couldn't even look out the window and do it.

ERICKSON: I didn't have a window and I carried my in-box around with me.

Q: What was the situation in Laos in 1956-58?

ERICKSON: One thing was that Souvanna Phouma was Prime Minister throughout the whole period. So in that sense it was stable. But he brought the Communists into the government during that period also, Prince Souphanouvong, who was head of the Pathet Lao.

Again our position was that you have to keep the Pathet Lao out, etc. Souvanna Phouma was always saying that we have to work together, etc. We did not appreciate Souvanna

Phouma entirely. I didn't at the time, but I think in retrospect we probably should have been more helpful to him.

Q: Your Ambassador was J. Graham Parsons. How did he operate?

ERICKSON: He operated as a real pro. He could have conversations, meetings and at the end he would always say “Now to sum up in review....” It was absolute synthesis and clarity and he reduced everything to simple elements in beautiful language. I have never met anybody like him, who could gather in all the information and hand it to you in perfect language without leaving any of the essence out.

Q: What was the economic situation in Laos at the time?

ERICKSON: Chaotic. They had no money for the military or for their civilian operations. They had really no institutions that were of any use either. I was involved 80 percent of the time with the AID program. I was the Ambassador's liaison with the AID mission there.

Q: What were we doing aid-wise?

ERICKSON: We were supporting their military totally and in the economic program, the police, the administration, the central bank. In every phase of their economy we were helping them on the aid side.

Again you must remember that this was the period when Walter Robertson was in the Department and everything is black or white as far as communism was concerned.

Q: Walter Robertson being the Assistant Secretary for the Far East.

ERICKSON: Everything in his eyes was related to China and communism. Laos wasn't pro-West enough for us and their officials weren't pro-West enough for us so therefore we were always kind of at loggerheads with them.

Q: Well, what about the French?

ERICKSON: The French felt we were totally undercutting them and our relations officially with the French were not at all good in Laos. We saw each other all the time and were polite, but the relationship was not good. We really didn't cooperate on any programs. But then I think that was true in all these Southeast Asian countries. We did replace them and they resented it.

Q: Looking at it at the time, did you feel that the Laotians were either bemused by the American presence or using it to get what they could out of it?

ERICKSON: No, I don't think so. There weren't the types who really tried to get everything out of it. They weren't playing both sides like Indonesia and some other countries did. They really wanted and needed the aid. They certainly had nothing. I think they were appreciative of it. Not, perhaps, everybody, but by and large they were. Both officials and Laotians who thought about it at all.

Q: What was your impression of our AID people? Did they know what they were doing?

ERICKSON: How much do you know about the AID program at that time?

Q: It is not for me, but for the record.

ERICKSON: We had so many problems with the AID people, beginning with their personalities. I came back to the Lao Desk and used to go down to the Hill and listen to all the hearings on the AID program in Laos. We really had many people who were the dregs there. Practically everybody was a volunteer and I think they all volunteered to get out of something or to make something. The head of our public works was finally tried here for corruption and sent to jail. The head of the mission had his car cut up and put down a well. It was simply a bad situation. There were a few competent and dedicated people, but by and large our AID program was terribly and badly run.

Q: Obviously as the Ambassador's liaison you must have been giving some feel of this to him. How was he dealing with this?

ERICKSON: Well, I think he did what he could. I think he thought more highly of people and their honesty than I did. I used to report things to him that I thought they were doing and he would call them in and they would somehow manage to convince him that they weren't all that bad. He was such a good ambassador and so supportive. I think he was great, but he thought people were more honorable than they really are.

The AID program was really a disaster from beginning to end. The roads they built were washed out, the money disappeared. All we were doing was buying time.

Q: What was your impressions of the Laotians?

ERICKSON: All the ones that we dealt with were French trained and not really all that competent because the French had used Vietnamese almost entirely to run the country. So the Laotians were totally inexperienced. But I found them willing and dedicated, but there were so few who had knowledge and authority that you could deal with that we all had to deal with practically the same people.

Q: Could you travel around or did you feel a threat from the Pathet Lao?

ERICKSON: We traveled around all the time except in the Communist held areas. They were really at that time mostly in the two northern provinces. We traveled in southern Laos. Again there were so few people that personally we knew everybody in the government from Souvanna Phouma to all the ministers, and saw them at lunch, dinners, etc. They were really friends. Even with Prince Souphanouvong the Communist, I sat down with him like this when there had been only five or six people and talked about fishing and his ideas.

Q: How would a royal prince get in bed with a communist?

ERICKSON: I think most people thought he was being bought by them, but I think he was brainwashed and believed in what he was doing.

Q: He sort of came out of the French intellectual left?

ERICKSON: Yes. I had an occasion under Freedom of Information to review Souvanna Phouma's diaries. They were given to the Library of Congress. The whole thing was handwritten in French covering ten years. I read every single page of all that. That was interesting as far as his opinion of us was concerned. I remember one comment, he said, “Strange as it may seem, the Embassy is saying the same thing as its intelligence agents.”

Q: Well, what about the Agency, the CIA? This was one of their happy hunting grounds in a way. They were running airlines, air forces, etc.

ERICKSON: They had their own airline. All of their cars were marked specially. They had separate nice housing. They stood out, not like a sore thumb but like a sore hand.

Q: Did they have their own guards, Hmongs, who looked quite different from everybody else?

ERICKSON: I don't remember that.

Q: When I was in Vietnam later on they had their own guards who came from a separate racial group.

ERICKSON: They were helping the Hmong.

Q: These guys were big and you could tell a CIA place because it had a big guard in front of it.

ERICKSON: In the Embassy there were no doorknobs on their offices. You always had to telephone. But as far as the public was concerned, everybody knew who they were and what they were doing. It was the most blatant operation I had ever seen.

Q: Was the feeling that they knew what they were doing or a bunch of freeloaders?

ERICKSON: For the Lao, I think they knew that is where you went if you wanted something.

Q: You were following the economic things. Did you find that they were intrusive in the economic field too?

ERICKSON: Not on the economic side. They were really political/military.

Q: What was your impression of the staff? You mentioned AID had these people, who were running away from something. I might add that that was my impression in 1969-70 when I was in Vietnam.

ERICKSON: It was true of the Embassy staff. More then half were volunteers who had done so just to get out or to do something. I remember we had a person who had lived in a tree for 12 years, and various strange types. It made for interest, but not for a very efficient operation.

Q: You were sitting there looking at reports from Saigon and from Phnom Penh. What were your impressions of the reporting and all you were getting from these other two parts of Indochina?

ERICKSON: I think we felt it was always overly optimistic from the American point of view of what we were accomplishing. If we would have done half of what was reported as being accomplished, we would have really done well.

Q: This was, I think, one of the great errors that we made —thinking things were done when they weren't done.

ERICKSON: And it was always convincingly done. You didn't really have anybody say that this wasn't really true.

Saigon at this time was rather peaceful. We went on R&R from Laos at that time to Saigon to have good meals and enjoy life.

Q: You left there in 1958 and came back to Washington where you served from 1958-62. What were you doing?

ERICKSON: In Southeast Asian Affairs, I was economic officer for Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam for the first two years. Then I was in charge of Cambodian affairs for the next two years. Again it was mainly working with AID programs and the Embassy as far as the economic side the first two years.

Q: The first two years would still be within the Eisenhower administration.

ERICKSON: It was very difficult to get any decisions even on the AID programs at that time.

Q: What was the problem?

ERICKSON: Every case had to be made in a half-page memo. Then Eisenhower would be on the golf course or something and you would wait, wait and wait. We couldn't even send instructions out because we couldn't get decisions.

Q: Also the President had some heart attacks. But your impression was that...

ERICKSON: Getting instructions out, as I recall, was difficult. However, getting them cleared through the State Department was probably just as difficult as getting them out of the White House at that point.

Q: Was it that nobody had the feel or just administratively tied up?

ERICKSON: I think it was administratively tied up. Certainly there was a lot of feeling, knowledge and care in the East Asian Bureau. Parsons came back to be Assistant Secretary of the Bureau and that is one of the reasons he asked me to come back and work on Laos.

Q: What was your impression of the AID program from the Washington point of view?

ERICKSON: It was just as bad or worse then from the local point of view in Vientiane. The paperwork, the administration, the decision making, everything that went into it....interminable meetings...to get anything done, any decision was very, very difficult. The hearings on the Hill were interminable in those days too on AID at least to Southeast Asia...I think everywhere. We were spending a lot of money at that period too. We had big programs. But everything was snafued. Maybe it still is.

Q: You didn't have any feel that there was really any strong control on what we were going to do, etc.?

ERICKSON: No. For Southeast Asia it was just hold on to the real estate. So what if you waste money. At least it didn't go to the communists. That was the whole purpose.

Q: Half way through...the Kennedy administration came in in 1961...by that time had you become the Cambodian, Laotian Desk officer?

ERICKSON: Yes. That was in 1960. I wrote parts of Kennedy's speech on Laos which he gave in January 1961.

Q: All of a sudden, Laos got on the front burner during this particular period. You had Harriman running around and doing some things. What was your impression when the Kennedy administration came in?

ERICKSON: I recall not too long after he took over there was a big meeting in the White House and Ambassador Parsons came back almost white because a decision was made that it was infeasible to support any kind of military operation in Laos. Of course, having worked all these years and our policy being never to let Laos go down the drain....the military said they couldn't support an operation there. So the decision was that we would not do so. That was the decision and traumatic from our little area view.

Q: We are talking about support in operation...there had been talk about putting troops into Laos. One problem was that there was no air field. There was nothing to support them, so you couldn't. But this never was in our thinking was it?

ERICKSON: It wasn't in our thinking except we kept repeating this determination not to let the Pathet Lao take over. The Lao couldn't keep them out even with our support. When we decided not to support them, it was like the writing on the wall, eventually they will take over.

Q: But Kennedy was making speeches about the domino theory and there were meetings with the Soviets. Were you sort of backstopping these efforts?

ERICKSON: I was really on Cambodia at that time rather then Laos. Chris Chapman was in charge of Lao affairs during this period.

Q: Well, what was happening in Cambodia in those days?

ERICKSON: We had the best relations we ever had when I was in charge of Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk had come to the United Nations and I was escort officer for him in 1961. He was in great form. The only time I ever saw Eisenhower in person was when we went

to see him during Sihanouk's visit. Also Sihanouk had a big reception in the Waldorf Astoria Towers for Khrushchev. Every leader of the bloc countries was there including Khrushchev. Sihanouk got so annoyed because all of the press and his invitees clustered around the communists, particularly Khrushchev, and ignored him. I was at the UN when Khrushchev took his shoe off and pounded the desk.

Sihanouk was totally in charge with virtually no opposition except isolated Khmer Rouge at that time. He was determined to keep it that way. But he wanted aid from both sides and that didn't sit well with the Department either.

Q: What was our analysis of Sihanouk in those days?

ERICKSON: That he was just a flighty type, interested in playing one side against the other. I didn't agree with that and was always arguing with my Vietnamese counterparts.

Q: Your Vietnamese counterpart was the desk officer?

ERICKSON: Yes, in the Southeast Asia Bureau. Ben Wood at the time. He was one of my best friends, but we argued all the time that Vietnam would run over Cambodia, and they finally did.

I think Sihanouk was a dedicated patriot and has proved to be. But that was not the opinion in the Department at that time.

Q: It still occurs, but particularly during the entire period of the cold war that we are talking about, there was pretty much the feeling that if you are not completely with us you are against us.

ERICKSON: It was that way.

Q: And Sihanouk was trying to walk that tight rope. How did we view the Khmer Rouge at this time?

ERICKSON: They were totally against us. They were the big threat.

Q: Did we realize how virulent they were at that time?

ERICKSON: I think so. They were considered just like the Pathet Lao in Laos. But Sihanouk was more able to control them then Souvanna Phouma.

Q: Were we giving any aid to Sihanouk?

ERICKSON: Oh yes.

Q: What was your impression of how the aid was working?

ERICKSON: Well, it was much better administered and well run program than the Laos program. We had some very good people at that time in Cambodia.

Q: How about Harriman? He was Assistant Secretary for Asian Affairs for a while. Did you have to deal with him at all?

ERICKSON: I don't remember dealing with him here in Washington. I remember only in Paris, during the peace talks in Paris when Bill Sullivan was with him.

Q: This was later on?

ERICKSON: This was later on. I was sent to Cambodia to see if we should renew diplomatic relations. That was in 1969. That was when I was in Personnel. That was my only contact with Harriman personally. But he was active in Cambodian affairs always. He was understanding and favorable to Sihanouk.

Q: What was the impression of the staff of East Asian Affairs that you were getting?

ERICKSON: As far as I know they all thought very highly of him. At least my Southeast Asian colleagues.

Q: They felt he had good access to the President?

ERICKSON: Yes.

Q: What about Dean Rusk? Did you get much of a feel about him or were you too much removed?

ERICKSON: I really don't have a feel for him. Acheson was out. Acheson was also interested in Cambodia. He, occasionally, would come in to see me when I was in charge of Cambodia. We would talk about the situation just for his enlightenment. He wanted to know what was going on.

Q: So he really was keeping up with things?

ERICKSON: Well, he was invited again later to Cambodia. I remember he wanted to know if one of his wife's paintings would be an appropriate gift for Sihanouk. He was genuinely knowledgeable and interested in Cambodia.

Q: You then went to Kobe/Osaka. Why don't we stop here for now.

Q: Today is July 9, 1992 and this is the second interview with Elden Erickson. You just said that you went to Kobe/Osaka where you were from 1962-64. How did that come about and what were you doing?

ERICKSON: I don't know how it came about, I was just assigned there. The vacancy came up in January and I was available.

Q: I take it you were considered kind of a Far Eastern hand?

ERICKSON: Yes, I had been in China, Laos and all four years in the Department in the Far East Bureau.

I was economic officer and deputy principal officer there in those days.

Q: Kobe/Osaka, what was the reason it was there and what was it dealing in during this period?

ERICKSON: It was the second or first industrial center of Japan. Tokyo/Yokohama was important, but Osaka, also for heavy industry. Also ship building, trade, tourism, automobiles.

Q: Your main concern then was industrial reporting?

ERICKSON: Yes. And trade promotion.

Q: Let's talk about trade promotion. In the 1990s it is probably the biggest bone of contention between Japan and the United States.

ERICKSON: In those days we had a rather heavy surplus in trade with Japan.

Q: So you weren't being pushed overly hard on it?

ERICKSON: But we did have lots of trade fairs and trade promotion activities, though.

Q: Were you seeing any of the closed economic system that has since developed?

ERICKSON: I think it was always there, but it continued to develop as they wanted to move faster and became more protective as time went along. Administrative management, or whatever they called it, they still had a way of promoting certain products and closing the market to the outside.

Q: What was your impression on what we were reporting back about Japanese industry at that time? How did we see it and what were our interests at that time?

ERICKSON: Our main interest was exchange and balance of trade. Really at that time we were heavily on the credit side so we wanted Japanese exports to the United States. Not that we didn't want to increase ours, but we wanted more to increase theirs. They didn't feel they were getting a fair shake in our market, either. We had some fairly restrictive practices at that time too. Especially textile quotas and auto parts. We restricted quite a number of things to protect United States industry.

I even felt strongly about it. I did my paper at the Air War College about how we had to be less restrictive....I regretted this later, but at that time it was not so much the Japanese as it was us.

Q: How did we view the political situation in Japan?

ERICKSON: Well, since the war it was as stable as it could be. We got along very well security-wise. We were friendly economically even though the trade balance was not so good. Our relations with the LDP were good.

Q: Liberal Democratic Party, which has been in power since 1948. How about our ties? Was it easy to talk with them?

ERICKSON: Oh, very easy. I know that some people think that the Japanese are difficult to understand, but I found dealing with them was very easy. I felt I could understand them and they understood me. I think part of it was age. They did not trust really young officers who spoke fluent Japanese. They always wanted to talk to someone older who didn't speak fluent Japanese.

Q: Was it that they felt they were talking to the top?

ERICKSON: It is in their own society too, the older a person...but often they would say, “I prefer not to speak to your young junior officer.”

Q: Were you beginning to feel any impact on the Japanese economy of our involvement in Vietnam, which was just beginning to get started?

ERICKSON: Well, we threw a lot of business to Japan during Vietnam to help the Japanese economy improve.

Q: Was this a period when our involvement was under question?

ERICKSON: No. We really had no serious problems with the Japanese at all during that period. Things were really very smooth.

Q: How about relations with the Embassy. Reischauer was the Ambassador.

ERICKSON: He was very well respected throughout by all elements of Japanese society.

Q: Did you feel his hand at Kobe/Osaka?

ERICKSON: He didn't come down too often to Osaka. I don't think we felt any heavy or light-handedness. He just left us more or less alone and we functioned independently.

Q: Did you get any impression about the Japanese hands ...those who trained in Japan? Were they mostly junior officers?

ERICKSON: Mostly, but they were very bright junior officers. They were really top quality in my opinion. Bill Clark, one of them, is back now to be Assistant Secretary.

Q: Then you left there in 1964 and attended the Air War College from 1964-65.

ERICKSON: Back to Japan, Kennedy was assassinated during that period. I had just gone to Tokyo, I was going to be the chief rapporteur for the Japan-US Ministerial Conference.

Q: In fact, Rusk and company were on their way in a plane to Tokyo...

ERICKSON: I had just gotten to Tokyo the day before and was staying with a USIA friend. He was called during the night and told about the attempted assassination—at that point he hadn't died. He and I went down to the press club and watched the tickers come in. It was really a very exciting moment. The conference was canceled and I immediately went back to Osaka. There was the most remarkable outpouring of sympathy I have ever seen in my life. The Japanese, who never show emotion, would come up to you and cry and say how sorry they were to hear about the President. We had a service in Osaka and one in Kobe. Absolutely jammed packed. It is hard to think that the Japanese who are unemotional normally, would express themselves like that.

Q: I was in Belgrade at that time. We had 100,000 people come to sign the book. My hand was practically bloody from shaking hands. When I told them my name was Kennedy they would just squeeze my hand with sympathy.

ERICKSON: This happened everywhere in the world.

Q: The Air War College is where?

ERICKSON: At Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama.

Q: What was your impression? Here you were a State Department type among all these Air Force bombers and fighter pilots.

ERICKSON: They were really a pretty good bunch. Orme Wilson was also from the State Department...there were the two of us. Some from USIA...there were ten civilians in the group.

We two from the State Department were looked upon as authorities on all foreign policy no matter whether we had been there or knew anything about it. We were the experts and the authority.

Q: I have heard this again and again that State Department people who go to the war colleges have been told that they were really there to instruct rather than to be instructed.

ERICKSON: In principle we were there to learn how the military mind operates.

Q: This was a time of growing involvement in Vietnam and here you were an East Asian hand, etc., how did you feel about it and what was sort of the interaction with the Air Force people?

ERICKSON: Well, this was the year when President Johnson decided that instead of just sending advisors, he would also send in American troops to fight. The Air Force, as a block, was so anxious to try out all the new weapons systems and felt “give us six months and it will all be over. Nuke them if necessary, but let's just go in and get it over with.” And of course, air power to them was the answer to everything. They were really gung-ho. Couldn't wait for the end of the term in 1965 in order to get out there.

Q: Did you find yourself playing a devil's advocate role?

ERICKSON: Mostly, because we just didn't feel the same way about the involvement. We felt that it was good to support the South Vietnamese but not to fight for them. If we fought for them there was nothing gained when it was over.

Q: From there your next assignment was Beirut where you served from 1965-67. What were you doing?

ERICKSON: I was economic counselor. It was the greatest period, I think, in Lebanese history. Everything was booming, everything was running. It was the banking center for the whole Middle East. There were about 80 banks, I think, operating in Beirut.

We could drive easily all through Syria. We drove to Turkey, to Jordan. Everyone was more or less friendly at the time.

Working was fantastic. We had lots of American businessmen, bankers, the airlines.

Q: It was a time when anyone dealing with the Middle East, European and American firms, felt Beirut was the place where you put your offices.

ERICKSON: It was a regional office for the Department of State, too. We had various elements of government there.

Q: From the economic point of view, how did we view Lebanon?

ERICKSON: Well, we were anxious to have Lebanon as a place to operate from, just as we were operating. It was THE one secure base in all the troubled Middle East that you could really count on to survive and be safe.

Q: A lot of Saudis and Egyptians were investing...

ERICKSON: The Gulf States too. The top people there would spend their summers in Lebanon and in the mountains there, rather than go to Europe.

Q: Dwight Porter was the Ambassador.

ERICKSON: Right.

Q: How did he operate?

ERICKSON: He was very low key, but I think he was very effective. He wasn't a Middle East expert, but he brought in everybody, cultivated, I think, the right people. Every other week he had a lunch for six or eight deputies, including Dayton Mak, who was political counselor. In small groups he brought in everybody. I was invited and participated in all the luncheons with the deputies and ministers. So I knew what was going on and given status by this as well.

Q: How did we feel about the political situation there?

ERICKSON: Well, Lebanon was the oasis of all this area and we felt the rest of the area was unsafe. But we really didn't consider Beirut and Lebanon would go down the drain at all.

Q: Looking back on it, were there any indicators of these divisive forces with the Palestinians with the various sects?

ERICKSON: The last fifty years or so the sects were negotiating with each other to strike a balance. Of course the Christians would count overseas Christians in order to give them an edge over the Muslims. But there was so much at stake in Lebanon that they usually negotiated so that things would go on and prosper.

Q: What was the general impression of our landing in Lebanon in 1958? This was some years later, but did people feel that it was unnecessary or a good thing?

ERICKSON: Most of the ones I talked to about it felt that it had to be done and it was a good thing that we did. They always hoped that we would do it again if necessary. We were looked upon as somebody who had always helped them.

Q: How about Israel? What was the view you had towards our reporting in Israel and the situation there?

ERICKSON: Actually there didn't seem to be all that many problems per se with Israel. Things were just sort of at a status quo during those two years.

Q: When did you leave Beirut?

ERICKSON: During the 1967 War. We were evacuated.

Q: What was your impression when this first came about?

ERICKSON: Things were already getting unsettled in other parts of the Middle East. Bob Paganelli, who was in Damascus, called us the week before and asked us if we would meet him at Chtaura and pick up Donna Paganelli and the two girls and bring them into Beirut and see that they left the country, because it was already tense in Syria. So we drove over and brought them back and put them on a ship. Within a week the war started in Beirut. We got to the evacuation center, Rome, earlier then they did because we flew.

Q: When this war came was there immediate change?

ERICKSON: Yes, but we did not...Beirut was kind of sacrosanct. We knew things had happened everywhere else but you felt secure in Beirut. It had always survived and was the haven for all the other refugees.

Q: What was the reason for your evacuation?

ERICKSON: Oh, on the very first day they stormed the Embassy and set fire in the lobby and trapped people there. They were setting fires at the University and the whole downtown port area was ablaze.

Q: Who were they?

ERICKSON: Mainly Palestinians. But incitement was being broadcast from Cairo. The Israelis threatened to bomb the airport. We had a part to play in that to try to keep them from bombing.

Q: How did the Embassy react to this?

ERICKSON: Mostly with shock. Again, we were up on the roof burning classified material practically all night. We hadn't disposed of any classified material. Again we felt Beirut was safe.

Q: Did you get any feeling about the Arabists in the Embassy? Did they pretty well stick to the political side? As an economic counselor were you able to use any of them?

ERICKSON: Oh, yes. We had them in the economic section as well as the political section.

Q: What was your impression of them?

ERICKSON: Oh, again, they were just as good as the Japanese. We really chose, for those languages, I think, good officers. There may have been a few who were not, but by and large they were great. Ed Djerejian was at the language school, finished and became the Ambassador's aide at that time.

Q: How did they evacuate you?

ERICKSON: By plane. First you would assemble at AUB, (American University, Beirut) and have a convoy or protected bus to the airport. But even then there was firing going on and you weren't sure whether....When my wife and son were at AUB they were breaking the windows and stuff at the time. They were on one of the first three planes that got out. It was touch and go. I was in the Embassy trying to contact people and telling them to get out. My finger was bloodied from dialing. I was telling people where there would be a bus, where they should try to go in order to get out.

Q: It must have caught the whole American business community as it caught the Embassy, by surprise.

ERICKSON: Well, it did, yes. I would like to put in a plug for Pan Am. They really came through like they did in the Far East and everywhere else to help evacuate.

Q: Pan American Airlines that is now defunct.

ERICKSON: I know, it is really sad for all the people who had counted on them for all those years.

Q: So your tour was cut?

ERICKSON: Well, we were due for home leave in two weeks. We got back and my son had to have a lung removed; so we didn't return. Otherwise we would have gone back.

Q: So then you were in Personnel from 1967-70. What were you doing in Personnel?

ERICKSON: I was head of personnel for the Far East and the regional Bureau.

Q: What was your impression of the personnel system at that time? There was an attempt to bring it under more centralized control and somewhat out of the hands of the bureau. How did you find this was working?

ERICKSON: I thought it created confusion to have each one pulling for its own team. As far as the Far East was concerned, I wanted the best officers for the Far East. As far as you were concerned you were trying to give training to the officers and make their assignments throughout the world. But maybe an adversarial, but not in the sense that...friendly rivalry was good but an adversarial position was not.

But I think to have it totally centralized would have been bad.

Q: I think you need the input and certain competition market forces working didn't hurt.

ERICKSON: And I must say that I felt that every person assigned to the Far East was “my” person. And I tried to take care of “my” people. When one of “my” persons was due for transfer I tried also to help him get what he wanted.

Q: Well, you were very much working on Vietnam, weren't you?

ERICKSON: Yes.

Q: How did you find the recruitment for getting Vietnam worked?

ERICKSON: In the beginning it was very easy because they were all volunteers. Later, it was more difficult. If people didn't have a valid reason for not going, they were often fired. Quite a number were put out of the Service.

Q: Was this a real problem? Did you see that we were losing good people?

ERICKSON: I don't think so. My position always was that you were worldwide availability or you weren't. If you weren't you shouldn't be in the Foreign Service. That is a personal thing, but I think it was generally the rule of the Department, too. But anybody with a valid excuse wasn't forced to go.

Q: How about the junior officers? That was a period of time when we were bringing them right into Vietnamese language and shipping them out. What were some of the problems with this?

ERICKSON: Well, again, by and large, it may seem strange, but that group of officers was rather gung-ho too. They were given rather important jobs in Vietnam for junior officers. We really didn't have a lot of complaints by those officers.

Q: Actually, I became one of your clients. I was in centralized Personnel and went to Vietnam as Consul General there in 1969. So I was under your sway. Just to get a feel, were you able at that time to use the Vietnam card, so when someone came for another assignment having served in Vietnam, were you able to say, "Look, so and so served in Vietnam and damn it they deserve something better then someone who comes out of Paris?"

ERICKSON: Yes, I think we did, but I think the whole Department Personnel system helped do that, not just the East Asia Bureau. Also, I used as a persuasive argument, that the chances of promotion were very good. Except for a few FSO-3s and FSO-2s, virtually everybody that went to Vietnam got one or two promotion. The few who didn't, the Minister or Minister-Counselor had something against them.

Q: It worked for me. I went in as an FSO-3 and a year later got a good assignment. Were you getting any impact there on political appointments? Not just Vietnam, but throughout the Far East? Were they coming up and saying, "Look we have a staff aide to Senator so-and-so, or a girl friend of Congressman so-and-so and you have to do something for him?"

ERICKSON: We had a number like that. My standard response to this was "Good, we will send you to language training and then out." That was the block. No one wanted to take Korean or Japanese, etc.

Again we were having trouble with the assignment of women. I had discovered that the Foreign Service was really anti-women in high positions. Every time there was a DCM vacancy we would submit a list of candidates and almost without exception, the ambassador never wanted a woman. There were various excuses for it. There was always some reason that you simply couldn't have a woman as your DCM. Blacks were very acceptable, although we didn't have many at that level at that time. But females were really difficult to place. I had one personnel officer in one of the major posts, Bangkok, who wanted only men assigned because she thought it was not a good place for women. I

dredged up the worst men, all the early-placement types, whenever she wanted somebody and would send them. Finally she called “uncle.” So I then sent her some good women.

Q: Did you find yourself in the personnel system that there was a certain amount of horse trading?

ERICKSON: Yes.

Q: Could you give us an idea?

ERICKSON: As you know, quite a number of assignments are made because so-and-so wants him and so-and-so had clout and got him. We would have meetings on senior training and the group would agree that so-and-so shouldn't go. Then the edict would come down that so-and-so will go, and he would go to the War College.

Q: I remember one time when we were sitting around debating who should go to senior training, which is the thing, and there were some bland reports on people who we didn't know. One name came up...and you were always such a polite gentleman about such things...but you said, “That son-of-a-bitch” distinctly. I don't think that gentleman went.

ERICKSON: It didn't get overruled?

Q: I think you made a persuasive point which was justly deserved. I think one has to feel that there is some justice in the Service. That you have to maintain certain standards of decency within the business.

ERICKSON: I don't remember who it was.

Q: I don't either, but I recall the incident.

ERICKSON: I do remember trying to not have a woman who was an alcoholic get senior training.

Q: You then went to Rotterdam as Consul General from 1970-74. How did you view that assignment?

ERICKSON: I thought it was the greatest assignment anybody could ever have. Better then being ambassador.

Q: This was one of the advantages of being in Personnel. If you serve your time you know what jobs are available.

ERICKSON: Well, Frank Wile, who was head of Personnel for EUR at the time...he and I had been together on Southeast Asian Affairs and then in Personnel...he said, “I have three jobs coming up. Consul General in Rotterdam, Consul General in Casablanca, and Consul General in Cape Town. Which one do you want?” I said, “Whichever one comes up first.” That was how that happened.

Q: You were there from 1970-74. I would have thought it would have been a difficult time because the Dutch activists were taking a very strong anti-Vietnam stance. This was a period of anti involvement in Vietnam also in the United States. There was a lot of encouragement for young people to get out and do nasty things. The Dutch have always been on the leading edge of this kind of thing, their young people.

ERICKSON: Well, that was the only dark spot really in the whole assignment. We did have Molotov cocktails and evacuations at the Consulate, and parades, etc. Except for the throwing of Molotov cocktails at the residence and the office, we didn't have any serious trouble. The people we dealt with really weren't all that anti.

Q: Well, Dutch society always seems to me to have a peculiar duality. You have extremely activists, almost anarchistic young people and a very staid, conservative business, political community. Did you find this to be true?

ERICKSON: Yes and fortunately for Holland the radical group is centered totally in Amsterdam. The Hague is a nice and quiet bedroom community. Rotterdam is a hardworking community. Leyden is intellectual with the university. The southern Maastricht area is conservative. So you could just shrug it off. The Dutch did too. It all happened in Amsterdam while the rest of Holland just went about its business.

Q: What was your main work?

ERICKSON: Again, in Holland we had first Bill Middendorf as Ambassador and then Kingdon Gould the next two years I was there. Both of them were totally trade oriented. I must say that in many ways they were both very good ambassadors. They were totally supportive of me. In Rotterdam, again, it was trade and economics. They would help in anyway they could. They would come down and see people, etc. at my request.

Q: How was Holland as a market for American goods?

ERICKSON: It was a good market for American products and also the biggest grain port for transhipment of grains and the biggest oil port in the world. US investment in Holland is tremendous. You know 40-50 percent of German trade goes up and down the Rhine through Holland.

Q: What were the main tasks of the Consulate?

ERICKSON: It was a small post, but a terribly active one. We had Congressmen and Senators all the time who had to see the “biggest port in the world.” We still had Consular invoices at that time. I think that has stopped now.

Q: Very little American shipping, I guess.

ERICKSON: There was quite a little. We still did a lot of seamen services. We had one fellow in the consular section that did entirely seamen related services. We also got all the

kids who ran out of money who were sent to Rotterdam from all over Europe for us to get work-a-ways on ships going to the United States. All immigrant visas were issued from Rotterdam.

Q: Did you find that there were areas in the United States, particular Congressmen, who were on your neck about things?

ERICKSON: No. It was more Congressmen from port cities who were always interested in Rotterdam, but they were never on my neck. Both the Ambassadors handled all of these visitors very well and we could always get the harbor master to get us a boat for touring, etc., so we could show them what was going on.

Q: Middendorf, what was his background?

ERICKSON: Investment banking.

Q: Was he Secretary of Navy before or after?

ERICKSON: Before.

Q: He was very well connected to Nixon.

ERICKSON: Kingdon Gould was the grandson of Jay Gould...and has interests in the Mayflower Hotel and all the parking lots I think in Washington. He was a real gentleman and a nice person, besides being a good ambassador.

Q: Were there any major elections or anything like that at that time?

ERICKSON: No, again, it was one of the few places I served which was relatively placid, calm and quiet. Except for the Vietnam side, it really was quiet.

Q: Who was throwing the Molotov cocktails?

ERICKSON: Young Vietnam protestors generally.

Q: Were these kids from Amsterdam coming over?

ERICKSON: Yes. We would have parades in Rotterdam, but they were always well controlled.

Q: We were having trouble, certainly later on, in Amsterdam because the local authorities didn't want to do anything. We were getting very close to closing our consulate there because there were some life threatening situations and the local authorities were not responding.

ERICKSON: The security forces in Rotterdam were just like the people there. They were hardline security forces and it was a different atmosphere.

Q: Then you left there and went off to Tokyo.

ERICKSON: Right. Back to Japan.

Q: How did you feel about that?

ERICKSON: Actually I was happy to go back to the Far East. I loved working with the Japanese contrary to many people. I felt that they were totally honorable. My opinion in dealing with them though was just to be frank and if they didn't want to have reciprocal responsibilities then you did something about it. But don't just go on and on saying how bad they are. You have to take measures against their protectionism. And they understand that.

Q: What were you doing?

ERICKSON: I was Economic/Commercial Counselor. But I was really just doing commercial work rather then economic.

Q: Had the commercial situation changed by this time?

ERICKSON: Tremendously. They were really going great guns since 1964. In ten years it had turned around totally and was becoming a big force in world trade. And things were so expensive. When I was there as a junior officer we could travel everywhere in Japan, stay in the most expensive places and enjoy them. But this time, three bites of celery cost a dollar and we couldn't afford to stay anywhere. We couldn't really afford to travel either. Official travel, yes, but not personal travel.

Q: How about James Hodgson as Ambassador? He was former Labor Secretary wasn't he?

ERICKSON: Yes.

Q: How did he operate?

ERICKSON: He was very low keyed. A very sincere type of person, but very much different, obviously, from Ambassador Reischauer who had the language and the respect because of his background. I don't think Hodgson was either a great plus or great minus. But he certainly was a good person and didn't do anything to reflect unfavorably on the US.

Q: Were you given a lot of pressure to "change" the Japanese system as far as protectionism, etc.?

ERICKSON: No. Again, there were quotas, quotas, quotas. Negotiations all the time.

Q: We have been playing this game now for 20 years or so. At that time, how did we approach it?

ERICKSON: It was all “temporary.” The Washington position was that our restrictions were just temporary restrictions to give our people a chance to catch up.

Q: Was it one of these things...I found in other circumstances as consular officer we would scream and yell about what happened to American citizens, yet we were drafting foreigners if they were on non-immigrant visas in the United States. If something like that were to happen in another country, we would protest like mad. It was very difficult for our people to see that what we did had a counterpart in another country. Were you spending a lot of time explaining to both sides?

ERICKSON: Yes.

Q: Did anybody listen?

ERICKSON: No.

Q: Did you find either Treasury or Commerce difficult to deal with?

ERICKSON: Treasury I found more difficult to deal with. Commerce was not so bad. Again it was textiles and cars.

Q: What was the Treasury people's main concern?

ERICKSON: I can't think of anything specific, but I remember they seemed to be inflexible on every point where we tried to do anything. They would be against it.

Q: Did you find yourself able to get to the various concerns that were importing and exporting to the United States? Did you have easy access to the higher echelons of Japanese business?

ERICKSON: Well, I was very lucky having been in Osaka first. I knew really as friends, heads of the top trading companies. I was a Rotary member in Osaka and many of

them were members. I saw these same people when they came to Tokyo. So I had an advantage there. But I really did have top echelon contacts with them.

Q: What was your impression of MITI?

ERICKSON: Ministry of International Trade and Industry. That was where they really regulate everything by administrative rules. They don't have laws enabling one to challenge their protectionists laws. They just do it administratively and very often it doesn't become known, but the effect is obvious that they are doing that.

Q: Were you able to make any contact with them?

ERICKSON: Oh yes. We had meetings with MITI all the time on various problems such as protectionism.

Q: How responsive did you find them?

ERICKSON: Very often it was really tacit denial that they were doing it. But they were always polite. Our problem is that we never said that if they didn't stop this we would do something.

Q: We couldn't drop the shoe.

ERICKSON: Yes. They would have understood if we had. They still would.

Q: Did you find that these rules...there are bureaucracies and bureaucracies and some are very much run from the top and everybody jumps, but other ones, and I found this in some oriental societies, middle and lower level people...

ERICKSON: The top would be caught because they really felt something probably should be done, but the middle bureaucracy was really solid against moving in that direction.

Q: This is what I found in Vietnam and Korea where I served. The middle bureaucracy...the top people really couldn't control them. There wasn't much of a way of ordering down.

ERICKSON: Yes, that was true of Japan.

Q: You were in Japan only a couple of years.

ERICKSON: I was only there a little over a year. My wife became ill from the pollution in Tokyo and was medically evacuated. I just stayed on until they found a replacement.

Q: The pollution was that bad?

ERICKSON: Yes. We were right there at the Embassy Compound just below the big overpass and all the pollution just dropped right down on us.

That was unfortunate for everybody, but it happened.

Q: Then you went off to the healthy, cold climate of Ottawa. You were there from 1975-78. You were what?

ERICKSON: The Economic/Commercial Counselor but doing commercial work. I did economic work in Beirut but mostly commercial work in Tokyo and Ottawa.

Q: What were the major problems with Canada? The Canadians are always complaining that it is like living with an elephant.

ERICKSON: We know nothing about them. Yes.

They were the greatest. Of all of my dealings in the Foreign Service, to deal with the Canadians was the easiest and friendliest and the best and honest, face-to-face people you could imagine.

Q: What were your major concerns?

ERICKSON: We were participating in tariff negotiations, etc. But the negotiations were always easy until we didn't agree.

Q: I am told the Canadians are some of the most difficult people to negotiate with.

ERICKSON: Again we were caught up in small things at that time. We had the fisheries problems, which are always with us. And agriculture problems, of course. We didn't have an automotive agreement at that time.

Q: Was oil pipeline a problem?

ERICKSON: No. Not at that time.

Q: Did the problems of cross-culturalism fall into your bailiwick?

ERICKSON: Oh, yes, communications of all kinds, television particularly. They were again trying to prevent US culture from crossing the border, but with television it was fairly difficult.

Q: One of the problems I think was that Canadian firms were advertising on American television because these were the major networks people were listening to.

ERICKSON: Well, most Canadians live within a 100 miles of the borders. Trudeau was Prime Minister the whole time I was there.

Q: Sitting in on country team meetings with the Ambassador and all, how did you view Trudeau?

ERICKSON: Well, that is very difficult to answer. We didn't really like him very much because he didn't always do what we would like to have him do.

Q: Did you feel that he was consistent?

ERICKSON: We thought he was consistent. It was this consistency that we didn't like.

Q: Did you feel he was anti-United States?

ERICKSON: He was totally a Canadian. He did like tweaking the US and I think we considered him not strongly anti-American, but with basically an anti-American feeling.

Q: What about Congress? Did Congress weigh in at all?

ERICKSON: Yes, on the communications and publications and things like that we had Congressional delegations from time to time.

Q: Did they make any headway either way?

ERICKSON: No, I don't think so. The Canadians usually manage to hold their own.

Q: This has been one of their great strengths hasn't it?

ERICKSON: The Ambassador during my period was Tom Enders. He didn't care too much whose toes he stepped on. He was promoting US policy and he made speeches all over. They weren't always that politic, but he was saying exactly what he thought should be done.

Q: What about Tom Enders? He has been a very controversial figure in the American Foreign Service. A very strong, highly intellectual person as you say. How did you find working for him?

ERICKSON: I got along very well with him. Sometimes I didn't approve of his method of operation, but again for preparation of all these speeches he wanted your input and everybody worked long hours supplying it. If he didn't like somebody, however, he would

get rid of him or make it known how he felt. He was not an easy person to deal with. But I think he was not all that interested in the commercial side, fortunately. He wanted everything to be taken care of but he didn't want to have to get too involved in it. I was just lucky in that respect.

Q: Did you find yourself running across all those border agreements, practically at the village level, in your efforts to promote trade?

ERICKSON: It wasn't really a problem for us. We had such excellent people in the local employees in the Canadians. That makes a big difference too, when you have experienced nationals.

Q: Were there any problems maintaining them?

ERICKSON: They were still the old timers when I was there and they were really career oriented and really knew more than a lot of the Americans.

Q: This is often the case. How about Quebec and the Separation Movement?

ERICKSON: The Separation Movement was active the whole three years I was there with the banning of English signs and trying to do away with everything Anglo. Levesque was in his ascendancy at that time.

Q: Did this cause commercial problems in having to persuade our exporters to put French into their business or not?

ERICKSON: Well, they had to do it because Quebec insisted that if it was to be sold it had to have French labels. Our duty there was just to make it known to all Americans that they had to meet all these new requirements. It was just a question of communication.

Q: Then you left Ottawa in 1978 and went for a relatively short tour to Frankfurt.

ERICKSON: Yes. They were changing the Foreign Service Act to allow us to work presumably until age 65. But I reached age 60, then mandatory retirement age, before the Act was changed the following year. I had expected to go for two years and return for two. But it turned out I was there only 18 months.

Q: Frankfurt is always a place dear to me because I took my Foreign Service exam there when I was in the Air Force and my first assignment was as vice consul there. It is quite a big Consulate General. What were your major duties?

ERICKSON: Well, there I was very lucky. Wolf Lehmann was the Consul General and he was German born and handled all the political and military work. He told me to run the rest of the Consulate. We had all the regional offices there, it was a big administrative job. A big banking, commercial job. I kept him informed of everything, but he really wanted me to take care of it all. So I did. That made it an interesting job.

Q: Were there any great problems there? How did you find dealing with the Germans opposed to the Japanese or Canadians?

ERICKSON: A bit more difficult. They were so smug in what they were doing and they were always right. Certainly we got along well, but they were very stubborn and determined. Of course they were doing so well you could hardly argue with them.

Q: Any major problems in your particular area of responsibility?

ERICKSON: No. Again, I guess because of my background I was heavily involved on the economic side. Also, we had to close because of fund restrictions our USIA office in Saarbrucken in the Saarland, so Wolf decided to make me special consul for the Saarland. So I went down one or two days every month. That was an interesting tour down there.

Q: What were our interests in the Saarland?

ERICKSON: At that time coal, steel, and exports from the industrial area there. Whereas in the beginning of my career there was always insurrection and war, at the end it was really quite pleasant and placid.

Q: You didn't feel that you were going to get trapped in the Consulate General or have to stay there.

ERICKSON: We had a few minor demonstrations against the airport and the environment while I was in Frankfurt, but that was all.

Q: Was the Green Party beginning to develop?

ERICKSON: It was beginning to grow, but there were only one or two persons elected at that time.

Q: Were we making environmental noises from the States trying to get others to be environmentally aware?

ERICKSON: Yes. I think they were at the same level or a little ahead of us on this.

So I ended my career. Dave Betts was the Consul General when I left.

Q: It is always amusing. Dave and I took the Foreign Service exam, three and a half days sitting next to each other in Frankfurt. He was a West Pointer and a First Lieutenant, I think, and I was an airman first class. I always remember that...we took the exam in uniforms.

ERICKSON: And he was on leave at the end of December, 1979. My secretary was on leave. The security officer was on leave. So I was the only one in my whole end of the Consulate building on the 31st of December. I locked up all the file cabinets and walked out. The Marine Guard saluted me and I was never permitted back again except escorted.

But we stayed on in Frankfurt until school was out because my son was a senior at the high school.

It was a great career.

Q: You enjoyed it.

ERICKSON: I loved it. But I don't miss it at all.

Q: I join you in that. Well, thank you very much.

ERICKSON: You're welcome.

End of interview